

paper going strong



AP Photo

Fifty years after Rockwell the weekly newspaper in the **g Post, the Appeal, like 300** other weeklies in Missouri, still is the only source for local news in the small town of 1,500.

work
ectic
War-
ation
e the
Read-
news
part-
school
serve

said. "Their retail business districts simply can't support a newspaper anymore."

Paris is an exception. The view from the newspaper's front steps shows a downtown full of locally owned stores — Harley Electric, Jonesy's ice cream, D&D Variety, Paris Pharmacy, a barbershop, a flower shop.

Subscribers are as loyal as the advertisers. Barnett has been tak-

ing the Appeal since he moved to Paris 59 years ago. Mrs. Menefee has been a subscriber 60 years.

And why not? Where else could they learn the lengthy guest list that Fred and Ruth Davis had over for Thanksgiving? Or read about the Paris Junior High eighth-grade girls' stunning 22-18 upset of Monroe City?

"We're still just a hometown paper," Reading said.

50 years after Rockwell, paper going

By JIM SALTER

Associated Press Writer

PARIS, Mo. — The manual typewriters are gone, replaced by Power Macintoshes. A printer's devil no longer sprints around the office as press time nears — these days, the newspaper is printed in another town.

But otherwise, things haven't really changed much in the 50 years since Norman Rockwell immortalized the weekly Monroe County Appeal with his painting of "The Country Editor."

The newspaper is still all local, the news mostly good. There are features and lots of sports, but still plenty of room for items on who's visiting from out of town, what's happening at the Baptist church, and who's in the hospital.

Now, as in 1946, the Appeal, like about 300 other weeklies in Missouri, is read and read again, a fixture in the living room until the next one arrives.

"I go over it pretty well, then I read it again and find things I missed," said Zelma Menefee, 85, a stack of newspapers the only sign of mess in the living room of her white frame home in this northeast Missouri town. "Then when I'm done, I cut it up to go in my scrapbooks."

A lot of people do. For small towns like Paris, population 1,500, the newspaper is the only source of local news.

"We need it," said Floyd "Doc" Barnett, 86, who still sees patients seven days a week. "It means life. It tells us what's going on in our little town."

Rockwell came to Paris in 1945 to capture the essence of the small-town newspaper office for the Saturday Evening Post. He spent a couple of days here, sketching, attending a country ham supper in his honor at a local tavern, speaking to the Rotarians. Rockwell then returned home to Vermont to paint, and his two-page, color illustration appeared on May 25, 1946.

The focal point of the painting is long-time Appeal editor Jack Blanton, who was by then already something of a legend for his well-crafted editorials, deep religious beliefs and occasional bouts of eccentricity.

Rockwell's painting portrayed the busy Appeal office minutes before the paper went to press. The Post described it this way:

"Blanton is shown batting out a last-minute editorial. That picture above his desk is one of his father,



Painter Norman Rockwell captured the life and times of the Monroe County Appeal newspaper in Paris, Mo., in this 1946 painting "The

Country Editor." Fifty years after Rockwell immortalized the weekly newspaper in the Saturday Evening Post, the Appeal, like 300 other w source 1,500.

who founded the Appeal. The gold-star service flag hangs beneath a picture of a grandson of Blanton's, who would have succeeded him as editor if he hadn't lost his life in the Army Air Force. Peering over Blanton's shoulder is the Appeal's printer, Paul Nipps, whose experienced eye is gauging the number of printed lines the editorial will take up."

The Appeal workers, all of whom have since died, had their moment of celebrity. Several big-city dailies reprinted the work, leading Blanton to write, "Waking up to find themselves famous, the Appeal office force now knows how the man felt who fell in the river and came up with his pockets full of fish."

A print of the painting still hangs prominently in the Appeal lobby, another copy in the office of owner Dick Fredrick.

The old building was torn down years ago, making way for a parking lot. Computers and laser printers have replaced typewriters and linotype. A press room is too expensive for most weeklies — the Appeal is now printed by the daily in nearby Mexico, the Ledger.

But much remains the same.

A handful of staffers still work long hours in an often hectic office. Managing editor Julie Warren and advertising-circulation manager Amber Bounds are the only full-time workers. Pat Reading is able to write all the news working part-time. Another part-timer sells ads, and a high school senior comes in afternoons to serve as proofreader.

And everyone pitches in to paste-up pages, answer phones, stuff inserts, bundle papers, even deliver them to stores.

The 1,600 Appeal subscribers appreciate the effort. Another 400 or so papers are sold each week over the counter, with customers lined up on Wednesday afternoons, waiting for the paper to arrive.

Like their daily brethren, small-town weeklies have declined in numbers through the century. About 800 existed in Missouri in 1900; that's down to 300 now. And one-fourth of those are suburban or alternative papers from the state's metro areas and bigger towns.

"There's been a serious downward trend that has something to do with the deterioration of smaller communities," Missouri Press Association news editor Kent Ford

said. "Their retail business districts simply can't support a newspaper anymore."

Paris is an exception. The view from the newspaper's front steps shows a downtown full of local-owned stores — Harley Electric, Jonesy's ice cream, D&D Variety, Paris Pharmacy, a barbershop, a flower shop.

Subscribers are as loyal as the advertisers. Barnett has been tal